

# Obituary



## Terry Cook, 1947–2014



Photograph by Lon Horwedel, taken at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, April 2013.

The archival world suffered an immense loss when Terry Cook died on 12 May 2014 after a year-long struggle with pancreatic cancer. A week later, hundreds of Terry's colleagues and friends filled to overflowing the Hulse, Playfair, and McGarry central chapel in Ottawa for his memorial service. The varied strands of his life came together then in the tributes, tears, humour, music, and the photographs and other items from the Cook family archives, including Terry's prized collection of Elvis Presley memorabilia. We mourned and laughed, said our farewells, and shared how much he meant to us. No doubt a great many more people from around the world wished they could have attend-

ed, as Terry was very likely the best-known and the most influential archivist of our time. Not only is he the most distinguished archival scholar Canada has produced, but when historians look back on his career, he will also be seen as one of the most important in the long history of archives. Although he leaves an extraordinary body of work, our loss is all the greater because Terry had much more to give, had he been able to complete the various projects he had on the go and in mind.

Even so, the loss to his family is immeasurably greater. He leaves Sharon, his wife of forty-four years (herself a distinguished historian and professor at the University of Ottawa), son Tim (a renowned military historian at the Canadian War Museum) and Tim's spouse, Sarah (an accomplished archivist at Library and Archives Canada), son Graham (a leading international trade lawyer at the World Trade Organization in Geneva), young granddaughters Chloe, Emma, and Paige, and, of course, his beloved dog Clifford. At the

memorial service, Tim and Graham spoke movingly about how much the family will miss their father's love, wisdom, and fun-loving ways. They had rallied around him during his illness and were able to be with him at the end.

Terry was born in Vancouver and grew up there and in Edmonton. He came to love the study of history early in life and went on to earn degrees in the subject from the University of Alberta (BA 1969), Carleton University, Ottawa (MA 1970), and Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario (PhD 1977). In the late 1970s, he was a member of a group of brilliant young intellectual historians led by Carl Berger, who had done pioneering work on conceptions of Canadian identity at the turn of the twentieth century. Terry's doctoral dissertation on Sir George Parkin, the most prominent Canadian spokesman at that time for the view that the Canadian identity was the key variant of a pan-imperial Britannic nationality, added a significant new perspective to that discussion. As a still-junior scholar, Terry joined Berger and others in placing the study of intellectual history on the map of Canadian scholarship.

In 1975, Terry joined the staff of the Federal Archives Division of the Public Archives of Canada (PAC). He brought to archival issues the considerable intellectual strength gained from historical scholarship just when it was needed most. Anglophone Canadian archivists were affirming their distinct professional identity in relation to historians in 1975 by ending their formal affiliation with the Canadian Historical Association and creating the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA). They did so in order to address the kinds of new intellectual challenges that Terry and his PAC colleagues were facing from expanding mandates for government records, among other increasing responsibilities. Over the rest of his career, Terry's contributions to professional discourse and institutional policies at PAC, later the National Archives of Canada and then Library and Archives Canada (LAC), had an impact that was also felt across the country and internationally.

The first vehicle Terry found for his growing engagement with archival issues in the late 1970s was the ACA's new scholarly journal *Archivaria*. He joined like-minded colleagues such as Peter Bower, Gordon Dodds, and Ed Dahl on the journal's editorial team. Terry acknowledged their important contribution to his own intellectual development as an archivist, and did much to bring their founding vision to fruition, not only as a contributor of seminal articles, but also as general editor himself (1982–84) and as a mentor to many other contributors and editors. He was a driving force that brought *Archivaria* distinction as one of the world's leading archival journals. In his essay in the inaugural issue, Dodds, who was also first president of the ACA, hoped the journal would nurture "the compleat archivist" or someone who "through a rich humanistic education and broad experience can cope in any situation." As Terry's close friend and colleague Joan Schwartz said in her eulogy at the memorial service, "Over the next two decades, Terry came to epitomize 'the compleat archivist' in the fullest sense of the word."

Throughout the late twentieth century, when there was considerable ferment among Canadian archivists over new directions that would shape the emerging profession and growing number of archives, Terry stressed the importance of placing these proposals on the best possible intellectual footing. In his editorial work and writing for *Archivaria*, as well as in ACA conference presentations, he urged his colleagues not to minimize the significant intellectual depth of archival work in historical and other disciplinary knowledge. With that in mind, he sparked and entered debates on a wide range of subjects, including total archives, the relationship between historical knowledge and archival work, the fonds concept and series system in arrangement and description, public programming, “paper minds” versus digital thinking, postmodernism, archival education, the relationship between libraries and archives, community archives, and professional ethics. He explored and illustrated his ideas in articles on archival history and the history of Canadian government administration, records, and recordkeeping. He filled his writings with apt examples of as-yet-undetected substantial problems, the challenging issues they present, and the best ways to think them through. He always moved from his assessment of those underlying ideas to practical measures that would follow. Terry challenged convention and urged his colleagues to think longer and harder about the best ground on which to build their new profession.

Terry’s signature contribution to this discussion – his macroappraisal concept and method – reflects this overall approach. He wanted to place appraisal on a footing that recognizes its intellectual complexity and central importance to archives. What comparatively small part of the vast amount of communications created each day should be archived? On what grounds should the decision to include or exclude a lasting memory of people and events be made? Who should make it? And how should it actually be carried out? Terry’s response influenced archival thinking and practice on appraisal around the world, including, of course, at LAC.

Terry saw archivists as the most qualified to guide the appraisal process and make the final appraisal decision, rather than the records’ creators or the subsequent users of archives, whose influence and interests had often figured more prominently in prior approaches. In his view, appraisal should be done in consultation with records creators and the wider public, including making open for critique the criteria and methods guiding archivists in their pivotal role in shaping the archival record. Archivists are key co-creators of the archives, its records, and the knowledge therein, not simply passive or neutral receivers, keepers, and retrievers of them. Terry maintained that archivists could only properly undertake this central role by making a much greater commitment to a contextual or “macro” approach to appraisal, one based on their knowledge of the history of both older and contemporary records. This “macro” perspective, acquired through their unique contact with the full range of records in their research and other work, would give them the breadth of knowledge of

records that no others had and that was required to do appraisal well. As he saw it, archivists could not possibly base appraisal decisions on the impossible task of reading the overwhelming mass of information in the records. They would have to base their decisions primarily on an assessment of the importance of the various record-creating contexts, such as the functions of records creators in relation to their impact on both the record-creating institution and society. Terry argued that this would create a more concise, inclusive, and thus useful archive for records creators, researchers, and society from the massive volume of records being created day by day. He went on to shape these ideas into practical appraisal policies at the National Archives and to administer them as the director of the Records Disposition Division between 1993 and 1998. In so doing, he served Canada with distinction as a public servant because he was the quintessential scholar-administrator.

Terry's writing in *Archivaria*, his work on macroappraisal, and his administrative leadership at the National Archives became widely recognized by the early 1990s, when he began to receive a steady stream of invitations to speak to archival audiences around the globe. His travels over the remaining years of his life were highlighted by three visits to Australia (including one for five months), where he fostered the vibrant intellectual exchange Canadians have enjoyed with our colleagues there; two visits to South Africa to advise on the development of new archival policies for the post-apartheid era, which resulted in the collaboration with Verne Harris that heightened the awareness of the role archives can play in pursuit of social justice; and Terry's 1996 plenary address on the history of archives to archivists from around the world at the Beijing International Congress of Archives. In these years, the immense variety and unmatched depth of his writings and presentations, ranging from keynote addresses to workshops, placed Canadian archival thinking at the foreground of international archival attention as never before. From the mid-1990s on, Terry's ideas not only continued to appear in *Archivaria*, but also in the world's other leading archival journals. He thereby shaped profoundly the international discussion of almost every archival function and major issue. He did more than any other archivist to map out the intellectual terrain of the modern archival profession. As Harris said in his eulogy at the memorial service, wherever he travels internationally, "I always have two conversations. One is in response to people finding out that I'm South African. Then we talk about Nelson Mandela. The other is in response to people finding out that I work in archives. Then we talk about Terry Cook."

As Terry's many publications and speaking engagements show, he was at heart an educator. And so when he retired from the National Archives in 1998, he readily accepted the University of Manitoba's invitation to join the faculty of the Department of History in the Master's Program in Archival Studies. We taught together for the next twelve years. Not surprisingly, Terry made a seamless transition to teaching. He was a master teacher who opened the

world of archives to our students. He took them through the various aspects of the overall archival problem or question: how do we create, preserve, and make available society's archives? Terry also supervised to completion seventeen MA theses, on subjects ranging from appraisal to photographic, digital, musical, athletic, human rights, women's, environmental, artistic, personal, and educational archives. Two of these students won the Department of History's Morton Gold Medal for outstanding performance in a given year from among the department's entire group of master's students. Two received the department's William Gordon Dodds Award for outstanding work in a given year by a graduating student from the Archival Studies Program. These students now include leaders in the Canadian archival profession. Needless to say, the archival program flourished.

Terry's Winnipeg years were not only about academic work. There were joyful social times – visiting with my wife, Sharon, and our family, and with close friends Gordon and Marietta Dodds and Peter Bower and Nancy Stunden. But even social occasions could end up in memorable archival moments. One evening, Terry and I were on our way to watch a Charlie Chaplin silent film, with music provided by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. We had to walk through the city hall complex to get to the concert hall. Along the way, we were pleasantly surprised to see a display of archival photographs from the City Archives and then, after a closer look, none other than the city clerk himself, Richard Kachur, guiding two people through the display. We learned later that, while leaving city hall that day, Kachur had noticed these two peering at the photographs through the window of the by-then closed display room. He had decided to open it and give them a personal tour and commentary. It was very gratifying to see this unprompted archival moment, since Terry and I had worked hard to help establish the City Archives in the late 1990s with Kachur's strong support. These archival moments, and many others like them that we shared over the years, were in the end what we worked for.

Although Terry had much to teach, he also wanted to learn. He knew that a good teacher had to keep learning. His international travels were as much about learning from archivists in other countries as they were about sharing his Canadian experience. Throughout his career, he sought out those who could inform him, engaging them in long written and/or oral conversations, trying out his ideas, fielding questions and doubts about his views, seeking some new way to look at a problem, and always generously crediting their insights in his famously long footnote acknowledgements. Noteworthy among them are renowned photography archivist Joan Schwartz, who was an editor with him on an influential double issue of *Archival Science* that focused on power, memory, and archives; appraisal theorist Helen Samuels, for whom he edited a Festschrift; dean of Canadian archival theorists Hugh Taylor, for whom he co-edited, with Gordon Dodds, a book of Taylor's essays and

reflections; and Verne Harris, for whose book *Archives and Social Justice: A South African Perspective* Terry wrote the foreword.

Terry knew, too, that despite his formidable powers of persuasion, he might have to settle for agreeing to disagree with someone. And he knew that he could be wrong, and could change his mind. That we shared so much in common in professional and other matters is one of the great joys of my life; even so, we did not always agree. But be advised: he knew well his own mind, and if you took him on, you were locking horns with the best and you had better have your case prepared. And he loved it. He never got angry or walked away. Terry's whole being reached for such intellectual engagement and enrichment. He read widely in many fields and was eager to share books, news clippings, websites, and articles. He could be in full flight within moments and soar there for hours. In these many ways, he was saying to us, "I want you, too, to enjoy exploring the immense richness of our field and of building our profession on it."

Terry served the archival profession in so many ways – as author, educator, editor, administrator, mentor, consultant, ACA's public spokesperson to government bodies (sometimes with the Canadian Historical Association and other allies), and through news media articles and interviews – that it is little wonder he was formally honoured by his colleagues. He was named a fellow of both the Association of Canadian Archivists and the Society of American Archivists. In 1998 and 2006, he received the W. Kaye Lamb Prize for the best article in *Archivaria* in those years, and he received the Fellows' Ernst Posner Award from the Society of American Archivists in 2002 for the outstanding article in the *American Archivist* that year. In 2010, he was recognized with one of the highest honours a Canadian scholar can achieve: induction into the Royal Society of Canada. Terry is one of very few archivists who have been elected to the RSC, and the first to be admitted for his contribution to archival scholarship. The full membership citation reads:

Terry Cook has transformed archives from being perceived as storehouses of old records to sites of power worthy of scholarly attention. In rethinking appraisal to decide what records become archives, responding to the challenges of digital records and critical theory and exploring archival history, Cook has developed, nationally and internationally, a distinctive voice for Canadian archival scholarship.

In late May 2013, Terry returned home from a trip feeling unwell. In early June came the devastating news of his pancreatic cancer. A year of aggressive and often painful treatments followed, made all the more anxious because the Cook family had been coping with son Tim's cancer diagnosis since early 2012. At one particularly hard time, Terry was on one floor of the hospital and Tim on another, with both recuperating later at the Cook condo, chatting companionably between naps. As anyone who knew Terry would have expected, he lived his final year as he had always lived life – to the full. He fought

as hard as he could to gain as much time as possible, but, knowing the odds were against him, he faced that fact with his formidable intellect and big heart. His doctors were amazed at how much and how quickly he learned about pancreatic cancer and how engaged he was in his care. He made as much time as he could for his family, particularly his adored granddaughters. He spent precious time with Tim and with Graham, who flew in a dozen times from his Geneva home to give the added support the family needed. Sharon and Sarah were pillars of strength for them all. Terry responded candidly about his condition to the worried inquiries of his friends, but then made every effort to engage them in the normal exchanges that he had always enjoyed about archival issues, public affairs, and shared pleasures of popular music, football, art, theatre, good food, and travel. And travel he continued, taking short holiday trips with Sharon or to visit friends for what was increasingly likely to be one last time. He buoyed their spirits, often with black humour that told them in effect, "I'm OK, despite our deep sorrow. I have had a great life. You were a special part of it. I want you to be OK, too." He read, wrote, and, of course, attended to his own archives, which is now at Queen's University. His body was failing, but his mind and generosity remained undimmed until the last.

As archivists well know, an end is only another beginning. Terry's work enters now into a new archival life – inspiring others, prompting new questions, critiquing and being critiqued – just as he would have wanted.

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